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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a substantial change in the way education is structured, financed, and managed in Australia. The move toward more self-management is now a feature of all Australian systems. In the state of Victoria, current decentralization has been a way to generate improved student outcomes, of a way to reduce the amount of government money spent on education. The "Schools of the Future" program initiated in Victoria has pushed self-management farther than most large school systems, with frameworks for local responsibilities for curricula, staffing, school funding, and local accountability. However, there is little evidence that the self-managing school is resulting in student attainment across the whole system. As it has become obvious that the "Schools of the Future" program was not the final model required to ensure both equity and effectiveness in Victoria's schools, the search for improvement has moved on with the "Schools of the Third Millennium" initiative. The areas of concentration for this program are the innovative use of multimedia in education, school autonomy, and quality management. This effort will push school self-management, within a government system, to its logical limit. A core of state-mandated requirements for all students and local curricula based on the needs of local students will be integral to Victoria's future schools. (Contains 27 references.) (SLD)

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Supporting All Students for Success: An Australian Design

An address presented at the National Centre for Education and the Economy Conference, San Diego, January 10-11, 1998

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Many schools are like little islands set apart from the mainland of life by a deep moat of convention and tradition. Across the moat there is a drawbridge, which is lowered at certain periods during the day in order that the part-time inhabitants may cross over to the island in the morning and go back to the mainland at night. Why do these young people go out to the island? They go there in order to learn how to live on the mainland.

(Carr, 1942:34)

Introduction

The international trend towards devolution of many of the decisions and responsibilities for managing schools to the school itself, with the end point being self-managing, or self-governing public schools, has been perhaps the most powerful influence changing the understanding of leadership in education over the past two decades. Many reasons have been given for the emergence of this form of management, but perhaps the most comprehensive description has been provided by Brian Caldwell, the conceptual architect of Victoria's *Schools of the Future*. He argued:

> Forces which have shaped current and emerging patterns of school management include a concern for efficiency in the management of public education, effects of the recession and financial crisis, complexity in the provision of education, empowerment of teachers and parents, the need for flexibility and responsiveness, the search for school effectiveness and school improvement, interest in choice and market forces in schooling, the politics of education, the establishment of new frameworks for industrial relations and the emergence of a national imperative.
>
> Caldwell (1993: xiii)

Instances that are usually identified come from Canada, where the Edmonton School District pioneered many of the features we see today, in the United Kingdom with Grant Maintained (GM) and Locally Managed (LM) Schools, in the United States with the charter school movement and in New Zealand, which adapted the Canadian model as a means for developing a national system of self-managing schools called *Schools of Tomorrow*. However, not only have countries such as England, New Zealand and the USA embarked on educational change, but Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, China and Korea, among others, have moved in the same direction. Yet there are clear differences between the policies of the west and the policies of the east, with nothing being more obvious than the issue of resources. Whereas countries such as the USA, the UK and New Zealand brought in their self-management policies at a time of unprecedented budget cuts, both Thailand and Malaysia have predicted substantial budgetary increases in the short and long term and a massive commitment to education as a central component of economic development. The Minister of Education of Thailand (Rangsitpol, 1996: 3), at a recent UNESCO Conference on Re-Engineering Education identified his government's 'policy to expand compulsory education from 6 years to 9 years and eventually 12 years.' The self-managing school concept was to be introduced not with cuts, but a 22.5% increase in the education budget from 1996 to 1997.

In recent years there has also been substantial change in the way in which education is structured, financed and managed in Australia. The move towards more self-managing schools, complete with school councils, school charters, school global budgets, quality assurance, school reviews, and the like, are now a feature of most, if not all, Australian school systems. One only has to look at the changes occurring in Western Australia (Better Schools, 1987), New South Wales (Schools Renewal, 1989) and Victoria

(Schools of the Future, 1993) and those that are emerging in Tasmania (Directions for Education, 1996) and Queensland (Leading Schools , 1997) to see the emphasis being placed on accountability, marketing and management, particularly as they impact on school communities.

This change has been seen by some as a destabilising force within school systems, perhaps because it can be argued that some schools have struggled to come to grips with new requirements, new procedures and new accountability measures. However, other schools have flourished under self-management. This seems to be the classic implementation of the Chinese word 'crisis', which is made up of two characters, one meaning 'danger' and one meaning 'opportunity'. School restructuring has been characterised by some as being a danger to the public school system but others have seen it as an opportunity, particularly for their own school. Townsend (1997: 225) characterised this in the following way:

> People currently involved in restructuring efforts could be considered as analogous to the surfer catching a wave breaking on the shore. They might remember the time when the sea was smooth, but now are faced with all sorts of upheavals that a breaking wave brings. Some will catch the wave and pick up speed towards the future, others will be dumped, and yet others will miss the wave altogether and be relegated to the thoughts of the past.

Victoria's *Schools of the Future*

Some observers have considered that the current Victorian decentralisation activity has been used as a means to generate improved student outcomes (an issue of quality), while others have considered that it has been used as a way of winding back the money spent on education (an issue of finance). Each of these possibilities needs further investigation.

Schools of the Future: Improving the quality of student outcomes

The identified reason for much of the decentralisation of educational management to the school site is that it will improve the quality of education for Victoria's children. This is typified by the rationale for *Schools of the Future*, which is a 'commitment to the view that quality outcomes of schooling can only be assured when decision-making takes place at the local level' (Directorate of School Education, 1993:1).

It argues the self-managing school is the model required for education as we head towards the next millennium. If each school is given equal resources (according to the needs of the students) and equal powers to determine the direction of the school, then all schools should be able to perform equally well when it comes to educating children. Successful schools can be held up as a beacon of possibility and less successful schools can be blamed for their own failure to achieve. Eric Hanushek had argued that there was little consistent relationship between educational expenditure and pupil achievement (Hanushek, 1986:1161). This allowed many governments to argue the case that they could increase the quality of student outcomes and decrease expenditure on education simultaneously.

The *Schools of the Future* is a program similar to others which now exist in many parts of the world. *Schools of the Future*, it was claimed, (Hayward, 1993) would:

- encourage the continuing improvement in the quality of educational programs and practices in Victorian schools to enhance student learning outcomes;

- actively foster the attributes of good schools in terms of leadership, school ethos, goals, planning and accountability process;
- build on a statewide framework of quality curriculum, programs and practices;
- encourage parents to participate directly in decisions that affect their child's education;
- recognise teachers as true professionals, able to determine their own careers and with the freedom to exercise their professional skills and judgements in the classroom;
- allow principals to become true leaders in their school with the ability to build and lead their teaching teams;
- enable communities, through the school charter, to determine the destiny of the school, its character and ethos;
- within guidelines, enable schools to develop their own programs to meet the individual needs of students; and
- be accountable to the community for the progress of the school and the achievements of its students.

It pushes the boundaries of school self-management perhaps further than any other large system. Within a broad cyclical framework of curriculum, people, resources and accountability (described in Caldwell, 1996; Spring, 1997; Hind, 1997), a range of strategies was put in place to fulfil a series of objectives. Kelly et al (1998: 9-11) describe these frameworks:

> The Curriculum Framework
> The Curriculum and Standards Framework provides the basis for curriculum planning from Preparatory Grade to Year 10—the compulsory years of schooling—over the eight nationally-agreed key learning areas: The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages Other Than English (LOTE), Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and the Environment, and Technology. Schools are expected to use the Curriculum and Standards Framework to undertake their own curriculum development and delivery and, at the same time, this Framework provides schools with detailed standards against which they can report on student achievement. The Curriculum and Standards Framework helps schools to address critical areas within the teaching and learning process, such as the development of literacy in the early years of schooling.
>
> For the senior years of schooling—Years 11 and 12—the curriculum is subject to the Victorian Certificate of Education which is administered by the Board of Studies, a statutory authority outside the Department of Education.

The People Framework

Responsibility for staffing schools, formerly a central bureaucratic function, now resides with schools themselves. Workforce planning to meet their own needs and having regard to their own circumstances has therefore become an important function of schools. The present government has been concerned to implement a performance culture throughout the school, particularly at the senior level. This is implicit in the contract system that has been implemented for principals and other members of the principal class. The system that has been adopted not only provides for the external assessment of the principal's performance but also confirms the principal as the key person involved in the selection of all other staff within the school and for their performance monitoring.

For the professional development of principals, the Department of Education has entered into a formal partnership with the relevant principals' associations and the University of Melbourne in establishing the Australian Principals Centre. Programs undertaken through this Centre include the Leadership Development Program, a principal and school development program, a coaching and mentoring program and a program on using advanced learning technologies.

For teachers, the Professional Recognition Program provides a career structure which recognises their vital importance in improving student learning outcomes. The Professional Recognition Program creates a leading teacher performance management structure. The recognition incentive salary levels are accessed through the achievement of outcomes specified in the teacher's performance plan.

All teachers are required to maintain a Professional Development Plan. A current priority is to train teachers in the use of the new learning technologies—a program will be conducted to train over 6,000 teachers per year over the next four years in this area. The funds for the professional development of the staff of a school have been incorporated in the School Global Budget to enable individual schools to plan programs for the specific needs of the staff in the school.

School Funding Framework

Through School Global Budgets, more than 90 percent of the Department's recurrent budget goes directly to schools. As a single line budget, the School Global Budget effectively places the school in a position where it can make the fundamental decisions about the allocation of teaching and other resources in the light of local conditions. This means that the school has the flexibility to allocate all resources in accordance with student learning needs. In particular, the school exercises control over the configuration of its staffing and the appointment of its staff. This is a most significant reform as staffing accounts for the greatest proportion of a school's overall resourcing, more than 85 per cent of the total school budget for most schools.

As funding for schools is provided largely on a per capita basis—the core funding component of the School Global Budget—there is general acceptance that schools are being funded in an equitable and transparent way. In addition funds are provided within the School Global Budget for students from a language background other than English, students with special learning needs, students with disabilities and impairments, students attending schools affected by rurality and isolation, and priority programs which might be promoted from time to time.

The Accountability Framework

Key elements of the Accountability Framework are:

- the School Charter;
- the Annual Report; and
- the Triennial Review.

These elements are integrated into a cohesive framework which enables schools to plan for improvement, monitor achievement, report on performance, and review and evaluate their programs and performance.

After more than four years of the system, it is obvious that the Victorian education system is close to, or at, the cutting edge of educational thought in many areas. In a very short time it had implemented self-managing schools, introduced computer technology into administration and multi-media and satellite technology into teaching. It introduced a curriculum framework and tied the triennial review process to progress in these frameworks. It put more of the total education resources than any comparable education system into the hands of school communities (although the British are rapidly catching up) and attempted to tie the level of resources to the needs of individual students. It introduced a reward system to encourage increased performance of teachers and administrators. In short, the Victorian government showed a commitment to educational change unsurpassed by any other Australian school system.

There is evidence that many of the changes brought about by *Schools of the Future* have been accepted by both principals and school communities. Since 1993, the Victorian Cooperative Research Project each year has asked principals to indicate their opinions about a range of outcomes of the implementation of *Schools of the Future*, including their levels of confidence about the outcomes, the expected benefits that have been realised and the problems associated with the implementation. The 1996 survey (Education Victoria, 1997) indicates that principals were moderately confident that their schools would attain many of their objectives including some related to:

- student learning - schools would develop their programs to meet the individual needs of their students (mean = 3.4, where 5.0 was the highest level of confidence), improved learning outcomes for students (3.3) and that resources would be allocated to the identified educational needs of students (3.5)

- local decision making - school communities would determine the destiny of the school (3.3), would make the school accountable to the community (3.8) and actively foster the attributes of good schools (3.9), a more relevant and responsive curriculum (3.2), improved long term planning (3.4) and shared decision making (3.5)

- leadership - the *Schools of the Future* program actively fosters leadership (3.9), allows principals to be true leaders (3.3), establishes management structures (3.6), better personnel management (3.4) and develops a leadership profile that suits the needs of the school (3.0)

- staffing - improved staff performance (3.3), recognise teachers as true professionals (3.2) and more cohesive staff and community (3.0)

- curriculum - the *Schools of the Future* program would encourage the continuing improvement in the quality of educational programs and practices (3.6), give the school the opportunity to innovate (3.2), provide a more relevant and responsive curriculum (3.2) and a series of responses that indicated the Curriculum Standards and Frameworks (CSF) improved the capacity to plan appropriate curriculum activities.

Perhaps the most interesting of the findings was that 86% of principals who had experienced both the centralised and decentralised model, indicated that they would not like to return to the centralised model. Townsend (1996b) reports that school communities, parents, teachers and school councillors, were very positive about many of the features of the *Schools of the Future* program, including the school charter process, the school goals and the relationships developed between classroom and parent, school and home.

However, there are still concerns about some aspects of the system. The Co-operative Research Project found (Education Victoria, 1997) that principals were concerned about resource issues, the possibilities of further change and their ability to balance leadership within the educational frameworks of the school with the new managerial demands made by the centre. Townsend (1996b) also found that parents, school councillors and teachers were concerned about issues of workload, the level of resources and were uncertain that the new management frameworks would make any difference to student performance. It seems unfortunate that the response to concerns about the level of resources, in 1997, as it had been in 1996, was dismissed as...'the arguably unrealistic expectation that there would be more resources'. (Directorate of School Education, 1996: 8 and Education Victoria, 1997: 8)

However, the real issue in any educational reform relates to its ability to improve educational attainment for students. Tickell (1995: 23) argued 'Whatever its other merits, the final test of the decentralisation of educational administration will be whether or not it leads to improvements in student learning'. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the self-managing school, in itself, has been able to create any marked improvement in student attainment across the whole system. At a Successful Schools conference in Victoria in mid-1997 Caldwell argued:

> Simply shifting responsibility, authority and accountability to the school level will not, by itself, have impact on learning and teaching unless explicit linkages are made.
> ...there will be no impact, and that is what the research has shown. This is most evident in recent meta-analyses on the impact of school-based management (SBM).
> ...They [Summers and Johnson, 1996] conclude, with justification, that 'there is little evidence to support the notion that SBM is effective in increasing student performance. There are very few quantitative studies, the studies are not statistically rigorous, and the evidence of positive results is either weak or non-existent' (p 80)
>
> (Caldwell, 1997: 2)

Other speakers at the conference supported this contention. Codding (1997: 15) argued:

> ...almost none of the widely advocated reforms - modular scheduling, open space, individualized instruction, different school governance experiments, vouchers, charter schools, the various curriculum reform initiatives - have survived or changed student performance.

and Hill and Crevola (1997: 2) suggested that:

> Improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools is not an easy matter. There have been many attempts to raise standards by one means or another, but reformers have invariably found that it is difficult to improve learning in a sustained way across more than a handful of schools at any one time.

What these comments suggest is that the relationship between the self-managing school and effectiveness is more-or-less random. Some students (and some schools) will do much better under a system such as *Schools of the Future*, but others will not improve at all. Worse, it may be the case that some students (or some schools) will go backwards under such a system. As Reynolds argues:

> Superimposing on schools a range of responsibilities such as managing teacher appraisal, starting school development planning and running ambitious improvement programmes is likely to result in the raising of the educational ceiling by competent persons in competent schools but is also likely to result in the floor of incompetence being left increasingly far behind.
>
> (Reynolds, 1994: 17)

In many respects, it may not be the school's, or even the school system's fault. Mann (1997: 6) quoted Steinberg (1996):

> [T]he failure of the school reform movement to reverse the decline in achievement is due to its emphasis on reforming schools and classrooms, and its general disregard of the contributing forces that, while outside the boundaries of the school, are probably more influential.

Given the difficulties implicit in trying to raise the quality of student achievement across whole systems, it is obvious that the search for the 'magic formula' must continue. Recent work in the United States indicated that restructuring might create significant improvements in student achievement at various year levels and in a range of academic subjects (maths, English, sciences, social studies) if the conditions are right. Newmann and Wehlage (1995: 3) described this notion as follows after examining schools across the United States:

> The most successful schools were those that used restructuring tools to help them function as professional communities. That is, they found a way to channel staff and student efforts toward a clear, commonly shared purpose for student learning, they created opportunities for teachers to collaborate and help one another achieve the purpose; and teachers in these schools took collective - not just individual - responsibility for student learning. Schools with strong professional communities were better able to offer authentic pedagogy and were more effective in promoting student achievement.

The Future: *Schools of the Third Millennium*

The Victorian Department of Education has always been innovative is seeking best practice for its education community. In the past few years, as it became obvious that the *Schools of the Future* was not the final model required to ensure both equity and effectiveness, the search for improvement recommenced.

On June 3 last year, the Minister for Education, the Hon Phillip Gude, launched a major initiative under the banner *Schools of the Third Millennium*. The rationale behind proceeding further and chart new territory is succinctly stated by the Minister in a Speech (17/10/97):

I fully acknowledge and applaud the achievements of schools under the *Schools of the Future* banner but I clearly recognise that '<u>one size does not fit all</u>'.

This is the reason that I have asked for advice on ways in which models can be brought in that will allow schools to grow at their own pace while meeting strict quality and accountability provision.

The Minister has established three Working Groups under the framework *Schools of the Third Millennium*. Each Group is chaired by a significant member of the business community and has a senior executive as the Deputy. The Groups are:

- Innovative Use of Multimedia
- Autonomous Schools
- Quality Management

Multimedia and *Schools of the Third Millennium*

A fundamental challenge is to ensure that all of our schools, no matter where they are on the continuum of sophistication in the use of multimedia, are able to integrate multimedia into the best teaching and learning programs possible.

Kelly et al (1998: 20) describe the processes that will be followed to implement multimedia into the government school system.

- In early 1998 - a Learning Technologies Statement setting targets for each school to achieve by the end of the year 2000 will be in front of each School Council.

- By March 1998 - a Teacher Skills Matrix to be in the hands of each teacher to enable them to assess themselves, set targets and move through the three levels of competence that have been established. A CD ROM package custom made to link this Matrix will be available in multiple copies in each school.

- By June 1998 - All Victorian Government schools to be connected by a minimum 64K ISDN link to the Government Vic One, Wide Area Network. This will give all our schools access to links and Internet capabilities previously available to a minority.

- By October/November 1998 - All schools to have access to the Department's Digital Resource Centre. This will be the main repository of educational content for schools to use in their program.

Autonomous Schools

In the search for the most appropriate model or models for future public schools, a world-wide search for best practice was undertaken. The American charter schools and the New American Schools and the UK Grant Maintained Schools models were visited and assessed. The technological basis for developed Asian countries was taken into account. Eventually, it was felt that there was no one single model that could succeed and that schools would need to be supported to establish their own. Kelly et al (1997: 21) argue:

> We are proud of the achievements of *Schools of the Future* but know that there are a minority of schools at one end of the spectrum who wish to be far more self-governing and have a very different set of relationships to the Department than they can at present. At the other end of the spectrum, we are keenly aware that many of our smaller schools find the current structure onerous as they attempt to fulfil their responsibilities and they would like to have options open to them to federate in some way. Such structures currently only exist in an informal sense, not in a formal sense of governance models.

They go on (p 21) to argue that a set of safeguards must be in place, to ensure equity and quality across the system.

The following platforms will not change:

- There will be no compulsory fees
- Local access to the nearest (neighbourhood) school is guaranteed
- The student code of conduct and placement of students whose behaviour is not acceptable will apply in all government schools
- All government schools will continue to provide education programs within the curriculum and assessment policy determined by the Board of Studies and the Department
- The accountability framework (charter, annual report, triennial review, audit) will continue to apply for all government schools
- That a performance management system would operate.

With these safeguards, it is possible that a range of community-oriented or curriculum - oriented models of school governance may emerge. Some may be close to being private schools, others may include consortia of schools and other agencies serving whole communities, but all will have been chosen by the community and supported in their development by the state.

Quality Management

The current situation of developing a school charter, making annual reports on progress and undertaking a Triennial Review to evaluate how well the school has achieved its goals and to determine new ones for a new school charter is seen to be a positive start to the process of quality management in schools. Although there is a continuing need to seek improved ways of measuring and promoting quality within schools, it is still early days in terms of putting this into place. many schools in Victoria have not yet undertaken their first triennial review. Those that have are generally performing well. The Office of School Review reports (Griffith, Mackay & Cuttance: 1998: 5):

> What has clearly emerged is a continuum of school performance from high achievement to below expectations. While the language of "failing school" has not been used, targeted school renewal policies and approaches are clearly necessary for a percentage of schools identified through the review process.

Future developments in the area of quality management will be more along the lines of fine tuning the current process, rather than starting the process again.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above, the Victorian Government is not resting on its laurels when it comes to the continuing search for improvement in schools. The *Schools of the Third Millennium* project, coming so close on the heels of the *Schools of the Future* project, is pushing the boundaries of self-management (but within a government system) to its logical limit. But still there is that nagging concern, that if the self-managing school has, so far, been unable to deliver the goods in terms of student achievement, then how will making them even more self-managing make the difference?

We might argue, as Minzey (1981) has, that in the past educational change has been similar to rearranging the toys in the toy box, when what we really needed was a whole new box. If so what might that box look like? During the recent Australian Council for Educational Administration Virtual conference, Beare (1997: 1) posed a question of a similar kind.

> If, as an educational planner, you were presented with a greenfields site on which a new town or suburb was to be built to accommodate dwellings for approximately 22,000 people, what schools or educational buildings would you offer the developer?

He argues that there are some things that you would not have, including:

- the egg-crate classrooms and long corridors;
- the notion of set class groups based on age-grade structures;
- The division of the school day into standard slabs of time;
- The linear curriculum parceled into step-by-step gradations;
- The parceling of human knowledge into pre-determined boxes called 'subjects';
- The division of staff by subject specialisation;
- The allocation of most school tasks to the person called 'teacher';
- The assumption that learning takes place in a place called 'school';
- The artificial walls that barricade school from home and community;
- The notion of a stand-alone school isolated from other schools;
- The notion of a school system bounded by a locality such as a state or even country;
- The limitation of 'formal schooling' to twelve years and between the ages of five and eighteen.

(adapted from Beare, 1997: 2-4)

If we accept his arguments about what schools in the future should not be, we have some indication of the task facing school communities, teachers and parents on the one hand, and governments and educational policy makers, on the other.

Perhaps the autonomous school, particularly the option of schools working with each other and with community agencies, might enable communities to redesign schools so they fit the needs of the future. We can then ask, and perhaps we haven't yet done this very well either, what are the needs of the future, both for individuals and for the society as a whole?

We might suggest that, for the first time in history, the needs of society and the needs of the individual might be identical. The following list of skills for the future is a starting point:

- a strong skill capability in literacy, numeracy and computer technology;
- cultural , artistic and human sensitivities;
- the ability to change work as work changes;
- the ability to learn and relearn;
- the ability to make decisions, individually and in groups;
- the ability to use leisure time profitably;
- the ability to make maximum use of diminishing resources;
- a commitment to work with others to improve the community;
- the ability to use technology as a means to an end.

However, it is important that we adopt a core-plus view of curriculum described by Townsend (1994: 113) as 'maintaining a core of state-mandated requirements for all students, plus the curriculum determined locally (based on the needs of the children from particular communities)' and that there is time and resources available for both. The central concern for education in the future is that all children get a chance to participate in a system that enables them to reach their potential.

The Victorian Department of Education has made many changes to the system over the past five years. Not all have been acceptable to everyone, but as the Chinese proverb suggests, we have certainly 'lived in interesting times'. The next five years promise to be just as interesting.

In my view the best education that we can hope for, for our students, for our families and for Australia, is one that is local (ie. in my community) and global (ie. provides access to the knowledge resources of the whole world). It is grounded in the community in which I live but opens up a world of possibilities. It is educative and it is social. It provides me with the skills that I need now and gives me access to those that I will need later. I am linked to my education at all times of the day and no matter where I am in the world. My school age children, the rest of my family, my neighbours and my friends can all participate with me. The school has become a community facility which is sometimes used for the education of children and has replaced the school which was not a community facility, but was only sometimes used for the education of children.

The most critical challenge for those making decisions about education at this time, at whatever level they are being made, is the one addressed by adapting Judy Codding's (1997: 17) final words at the *Successful Schools* conference: 'The best guide I had as a high school principal was to try to do for the 2,500 students I had responsibility for in my school, what I would want done for my own three children'. We might now suggest that the best guide we, as educators, have for improving the quality of education provision for school communities throughout the state is to consider what we would want done for our own families. We would want the best school to be our local school.

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